

The First Book in the "Counter-Media" series published by the Information Section of the Libyan Arab People's Bureau – Malta.

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THE INFORMATION
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LIBYAN PEOPLE'S
BUREAU
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HAMRUN – MALTA.



This book has been compiled after a thorough research by a number of journalists and writers. Through this book they expose the truth and lay down the base facts of Western and imperialist policy towards the Third World and the developing countries; they create an awareness of the dangers behind the information campaigns and distorted reports being circulated by the Western and Imperialist press on peoples of the Third World who seek nothing more than their natural right of self-determination, freedom and of living in peaceful co-existence with all other peoples of the world.

THE PUBLISHERS.



1911 ALIBYAN JIHAD

3

The Third book in the "COUNTER-MEDIA" series published by the Information Section of the Libyan Arab People's Bureau – Malta.

P.O. Box 17
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MALTA

April, 1982.

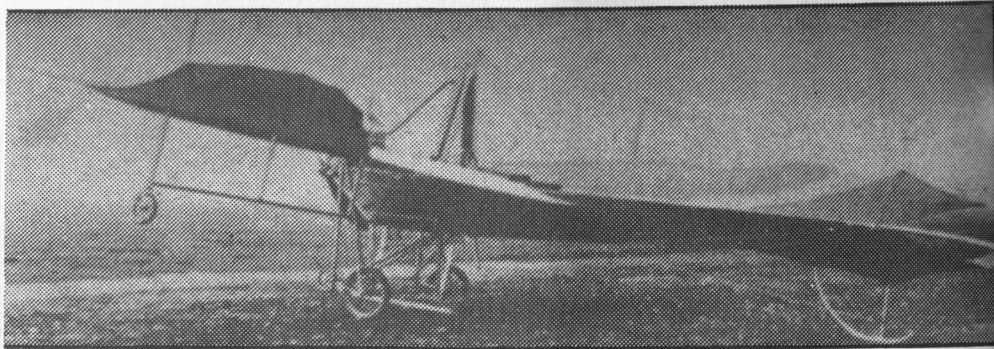
The success achieved by the first two books in the Counter Media series, Terror over the Bay and Apocalypse-N, encouraged us to publish this third book in the same series.

It mostly deals with the past struggle by Libyan freedom-fighters for the liberation of their homeland. It exposes the sufferings, massacres and hatred showered on Libya and her people by foreign powers, be they Italian or others.

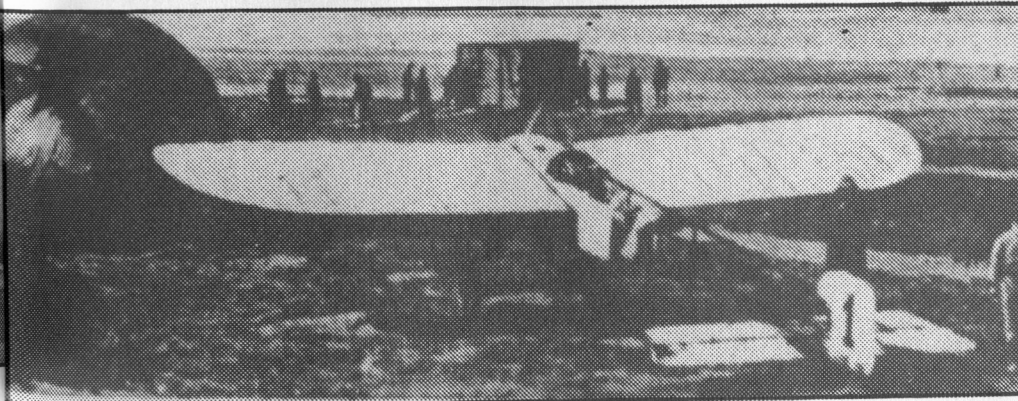
Although possessing the barest and most outdated weapons at the time, they took up the struggle against the foreign invaders. For them, their strong belief in freedom was the best weapon they ever had.

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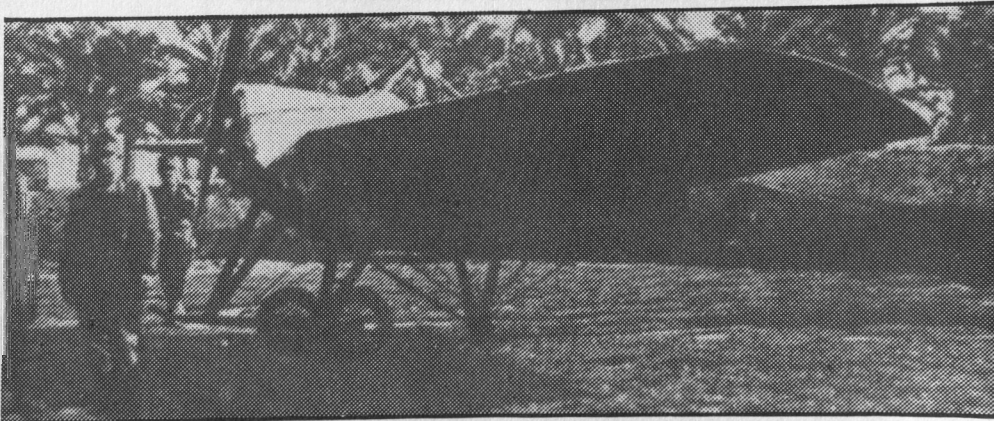
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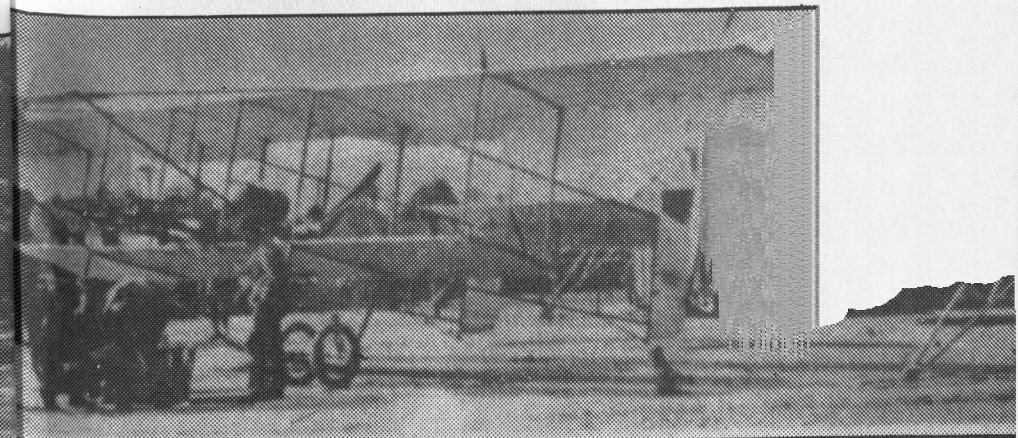
The Etrich "Taube" aircraft used by the Italians against the Libyans in which Lt Giulio Gavotti carried out the first bombing raid in history when on the 1st of November 1911 he dropped three bombs on Tagiura and one on Ain Zara, intentionally hitting a clearly marked hospital. The Etrich, a two seater powered by a 65 h.p. engine, was usually flown as a single seater to increase its range and bomb-load capacity.



The Bleriot, a two seat version of the aircraft in which the designer and builder Louis Bleriot carried out the first crossing of the English Channel, was used by the Italians in Libya until 1922 when it gave place to more modern machines. The photo shows a Bleriot on a Libyan airfield during operations against "the rebels".



Another Italian Air force aircraft used against the Libyans from 1911 onwards was the Nieuport Monoplane (one-wing) which was one of the best types available during that early stage of aircraft development.



A scene at an Italian occupied Libyan airfield showing maintenance being carried out on a Henry Farman aircraft. On the right can be seen the rear fuselage and tail of a Deperdussin.

FORWARD

October 7th, 1911 meant the beginning of a nightmare for Libya as Italy made her bid to re-create the lost Roman Empire, with her ruthless occupation of this North African country.

The occupation started with an armada of highly armed forces sailing from Italy towards the Libyan shores. Instead of the expected praise and singing, the Italians were met by a strong popular resistance, hastily organized by the Libyan Arab people. As news spread of the Italian invasion, the Libyans vowed to join forces in a Jihad, a Holy War, for God and country. Under the slogan of **"Victory or Martyrdom"**, the Libyans fought valiantly and heroically against a leading world power far superior to them in arms and numbers. Under such overwhelming odds, the Libyan Freedom Fighters secured limited victories. Outnumbered one to ten, the Mujahidin were able to siege the Italians in coastal cities such as Tripoli, Al-Khoms, Misurata and Benghazi.

The invading storm troopers sought revenge. Torture, rape, execution and public hangings, in which members of the victims' families were forced to watch, were the orders of the day.

The Italian military leader, General Graziani, himself reported in the book he wrote on his African campaign that his forces were protected and supported by a large caravan laden with all sorts of supplies, from foodstuff to clothes, water and any number of modern weapons. The Mujahidin, on the other hand, battled barefoot and hungry; also hindered by their lack of modern armaments and burdened with their families and flocks.

Graziani's aim in this occupation was transparently clear. He was after the total elimination of the Libyan people. Despite the Italians' superiority in numbers and weapons, they did not find the going easy.

The Fascist occupation of Libya is something which must never be forgotten, for a country without a past has no present or future. Now that the Libyans are free, now that they have become masters of their land possessing authority, wealth, and arms and now that they are setting an example for other people, they must also remind the world of the price they paid. They must remind the world of the hangings, the tortured bodies of men, women, and children, of the hunger and oppression, they had to bear.



THE RISE

The beginning of the Twentieth Century saw the majority of the European nations, France and Britain in particular, waxing richer and richer on the exploitation of smaller nations in Asia and Africa, which had become victims of colonialist invasions. Asian and African countries were then being ruled with an iron fist which meant the massacre of hundreds of thousands of people living in these subjugated countries. The era of Great Empires, on which the sun never set, was at its height.

In 1911, Italy was a comparatively young nation, seeking to re-create the lost Roman Empire. It has wanted to join her European counterparts and partake in the spoils of colonialization.

For centuries, Italy had been divided into small kingdoms and duchies which, over the years, were united by force into the Papal States under the temporal power of the leader of the Catholic Church, lest they end up conquered by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was only in the late 1800's that Italy after a long struggle achieved her unity and independence.

By then, Italy had already started casting an envious eye on its European neighbours, namely France, Britain and Germany. Great Empires had been created by conquering small nations in Africa, Asia and elsewhere.

Internally, Italy was troubled by continuous political strife between the liberal, anti-clerical elements and the extreme nationalist and conservative faction. Besides, the Italians were carrying with them a shadow of shame following their defeat in Abyssinia. They had attempted to re-build the Empire there and completely failed. Several thousands of Italian troops had met certain death. The nationalist movement in Italy was headed by such extremists as the poet Gabriele d'Annunzio, the writer and poet Enrico Corradini, and other of the same like. For such likes, the most cowardly and pacific and therefore the most hated, was none other than the Liberal Prime Minister Giolitti.

The Italians dreamed of bygone times when the Romans had ruled over the known world and when all nations paid tribute to them. Their dreams also went back to more recent times when the head of the Roman Catholic Church, the Pope, had ruled over most of Italy while his political influence stretched far from Italy's shores. Such were the Nationalists!

Prime Minister Giolitti had by then already gauged the

force and direction of the Nationalist tide and, being politically seasoned he managed to retain his office. In fact he was Prime Minister of Italy for periods between 1882-93, 1903-05, 1911-14 and 1920-21. When not in office he was generally credited with his ability to control his country's parliament by what historians describe as **"his skill in manipulating party combinations."**

During his tenure of office between the years 1903-05 Giolitti had already reached a secret agreement with Imperialist France in which the latter pledged herself to uphold Italian supremacy and priority in Libya in exchange for a similar French priority in Morocco. Great Britain, for her part, was granted liberty of action to further her imperialist aims and interests in Egypt and the Sudan.

In typical fashion, Giolitti sought to capture for himself some of the power inherent in the nationalist cause. When the nationalists gained mass support for a war against the **"enfeebled"** Ottoman Empire, with the prize being Libya, Giolitti raised their cry of **"our promised land"** as his own.

The year 1911 was bursting with patriotic excitement in Italy especially since it commemorated the half century of a united Italy and everyone had by then started dreaming of glory and greatness. Everyone in Italy, except for some Socialists and many soldiers, who were to be the ones to face the enemy, wanted and craved war with Libya.

The Italian monarch Vittorio Emanuele III, had even described the aggression against the Libyan people as **"a necessary war."**

In his diary he was to write:

"I, who do not love war, wanted the Libyan war because it was a necessary war in order not to die of suffocation in the Mediterranean."

The nationalists whipped up support for the war by means of thousands of meetings and manifestations that took place all over the country.

The following report on a Catholic organization meeting was sent by the Police prefect to the Minister of the Interior dated October 15th, 1911, clearly illustrates the campaigning that was being conducted at the time:

"Lawyer Vincenzo Mangano emphasized the importance of the sulphur trade and the danger of the terrible competition that will be faced by the mines of Sicily if the sulphur mines of Tripolitania were allowed to fall in the hands of another nation. At this point, great applause and shouts of 'Viva Tripoli Italiana' and 'Viva l'Esercito Italiano' (Long Live Italian Tripoli and Long Live the Italian

Army) greeted the Speaker.

The Cappuccin missionary, Father Roberto da Nova then took the floor and in a few forceful words told the audience that, whilst all Europeans abandoned Tripoli at the threat of war, the Franciscan missionaries did not run. To those courageous men, who had remained alone among the barbarians, has been awarded the high honour of being the first to kiss and greet our brave soldiers on landing in the land.

A frantic long ovation – with repeated shouts of "Viva Tripoli", "Viva l'Italia" and "Viva l'Esercito Italiano" broke out at the missionaries' words."

Thus reported the Police Prefect of Perugia.

Although in his speech at the reported meeting, Lawyer Mangano tried to justify Italy's aggression against the Libyan people as being economical, that is because of the competition posed by the sulphur mines of Tripoli, the British apologist for Italy, Charles Lapworth, in his book *Tripoli e la Italia Nuova* (Tripoli and the New Italy), which was published by the firm Nivola Zenichelli of Bologna in 1912, had claimed that Italy did not occupy Libya for a capitalist mirage. He wrote that **"Libya today is not as fruitful and prosperous as in the past and, as far as is known, it has no deposits of gold or diamonds."**

Lapworth attempted to justify Italy's aggression on Libya as a political necessity. He was to write: **"Italy had claimed first right over Tunisia but was forced back by a stronger competitor, France. Italy was also left out in the cold during the carving up of Morocco because of the wrong decisions of its Ministers and the treachery of her friends. Now Italy took advantage of the only door left open to her – Libya."**

Lapworth was also to claim, – correctly enough – that Italy's right to Tripoli had been repeatedly recognized by the two imperialist powers Britain and France.



THE INVASION

For several years, the Libyan Arab people had been living in virtual independence under the nominal sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire, which was directed far away from Libya's shores in Turkey.

The Italian Government looked to find a suitable excuse to justify its aggression against Turkey and for its invasion of Libya. Such an excuse was eventually found in the presence of a small Italian community residing in Libya. The Italian propaganda machine went into action and stories of Turkish and Arab persecution against the Italian community were produced regularly and distributed to the world's press and information media.

In fact, in his efforts to seek a justification of Italy's aggression against the Libyan people, the British author Charles Lapworth, in his book *Tripoli e la Nuova Italia* (Tripoli and the New Italy) was to claim piously that **"Italy could not tolerate any more persecution of its nationalists in Tripoli."**

The truth is that there was no booming Italian community in Libya. The Christians living in all Turkish North Africa barely numbered 4,000 and of these, only around 850 were Italians. Besides, there exists absolutely no proof at all that they were being persecuted in any way...except for their imaginary stories for propaganda purposes.

This fictitious problem was used by the Italian Government for Italy's declaration of war on Turkey. On the 23rd of September 1911, a formal protest was sent by the Italian Government to Constantinople about the alleged failure of the Turkish authorities to protect Italian interests and nationalists in Tripoli.

In a diplomatic note delivered on September 25th, the Italian Ambassador to Turkey claimed that the small Italian community was being threatened by their Turkish neighbours. Then followed what has been diplomatically and historically described as an incredible ultimatum to Constantinople. Italy demanded that Tripoli and Cyrenaica be abandoned to Italian military occupation within twenty-four hours.

At the end of September, Italy declared war on Turkey and threw a naval blockade around Tripoli and Cyrenaica. Five days later, Vice-Admiral Faravelli's battleships unleashed a terrible bombardment on Tripoli while Admiral Cagni landed 1,700 Marines who stormed the old defenses and held the town until the arrival of 34,000 reinforcements a few hours

later. While these reinforcements poured into Tripoli, Admiral Millo led his ships in a series of raids bombarding Tobruk on October 5th and Derna on the 16th. Benghazi fell on October 22nd after an engagement in which Italians lost seventy and the defenders over five hundred.

Some organizations, which were on the forefront of the devotion to the Vatican, like the Sovereign Order of Malta, took a direct part in the invasion. This Order, which had been expelled from Malta in 1798 by Napoleon and was then based in Rome, sent a hospital ship with the invading fleet to take care of casualties. The Order's participation in the Libyan invasion evoked images of earlier times when the galleys of the Knights sailed to invade the Holy Land.

For the Catholic militant organization, the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), the war with Libya had an added advantage for the Catholic Church in Italy *"of reducing almost to nothing all anarchic and anti-clerical activity of the subversive parties."* (Quote taken from the Jesuits' newspaper "Civiltà Cattolica.")

Although the North African campaign began brilliantly for the Italians, the occupation of the Libyan hinterland seemed to be a totally different matter. In Tripolitania an Arab uprising in the occupied lands provoked the Italians into taking ferocious reprisals reminiscent of the uninhibited slaughter of the Abyssinian campaign. Atrocities against the Libyan Arab people began on October 29th, just a few days after the invasion. The Libyan war had turned out to be a terrible mistake for Italy and Libya had become an expensive cemetery for two generations of Italians.

Italy had planned on conducting a *"Blitzkrieg"* tactic in Libya. It had planned that the occupation of Libya would be accomplished in a matter of days and maybe even without firing a single shot thereby presenting to the whole world a 'fait accompli'. As history bears witness, it turned out that the campaign dragged on for a whole year whilst resistance and rebellion from the Libyans carried on for another twenty years.

The Italian King annexed Libya by royal decree; the Royal Army, in turn, bungled every battle. Their war crimes and atrocities were of such proportions that fellow Europeans expressed 'shock' and even went as far as to denounce Italy's conduct as *"barbarous and uncivilized even by imperialist standards."*

Amongst the critics of Italy's barbaric methods of warfare against the Libyan Arab people was the British author G.M. Trevelyan, who had previously been a stolid supporter of the new Italy. In fact, his popular historical study

Garibaldi and the Thousand, which dealt with the struggle for the unification of Italy, played a big part in turning Italy into Britain's *"darling"*.

The Italian propaganda machinery retaliated by publishing stories of alleged atrocities committed by the Turks against Italian soldiers and civilians living in Tripoli. But in spite of all these campaigns, even their biggest apologists and supporters could not hide the fact that many innocent folk were killed by the Italian soldiers.

A case in point was the already mentioned book of Charles Lapworth **Tripoli e la Nuova Italia**. Despite great attempts to gloss over Italian atrocities, even Lapworth could not avoid having to admit to such genocide. He, in fact, wrote: *"Without doubt in the policing of hostile villages situated behind the shoulders of the Italian troops, many innocents died together with the guilty. Unfortunately, such happenings are inevitable. However, in every case, only the urgency of the situation justified such severity. In Tripoli the Arabs have no fatherland and never had; they cannot understand what it means to fight for one's native land. As such there was no state of war as is known in civilized countries. But still, the Italians limited themselves to execute summarily only those who, after repeated warnings were found in possession of arms"*, wrote Lapworth.

In this way did the Italians and their supporters justify the mass killings carried out against a people who only wanted to live in peace and freedom and who had proved their readiness to suffer and die towards achieving these aims.



TURKEY OPTS OUT

The Italians embarked on the war with Libya blinded by their very own propaganda that the Turks were "sick" the Arabs "Cowards", even though these "sickly and cowardly" people fought back tenaciously and skillfully.

The leading Italian historian Volpi, in his study concerning the Italian invasion of Libya, was to comment and declare that *"to tell the truth, everyone in Italy was convinced that the war would not be a long or difficult affair."*

The Turkish garrisons, their supply links to the sea blocked by the invading forces, were forced to surrender.

Volpi later also wrote that the whole complex of social forces entered the contest awakening a people, keenly sensitive to the calling of their religion and capable of their own national sentiments which had been lying dormant.

Despite this analysis, albeit a case of being wise after the event, the extreme nationalists in Italy persisted in viewing the Libyan people as a herd of insidious subhuman creatures. It had taken Italy her whole naval force and 100,000 troops to subdue one-fourth as many Arabs and Turks.

On the Turkish side in Libya were several personalities who were later to feature very prominently in the history of the Turkish nation. Among them were Enver Bey and Mustapha Kemal Bey, later known as Ataturk or Father of the Turks.

In spite of such overwhelming odds in the Italians favour, they did not conquer and only managed to reach a compromise solution. Turkey was, at the same time, having trouble on her home front in the Balkans. All the new Balkan kingdoms had designs on the remaining Turkish territory and early in 1912, an alliance was formed between Bulgaria and Serbia. Shortly afterwards, Greece joined these two nations in the anti-Turkey alliance.

Turkey; therefore, had to accept to enter into talks with Italy. These talks held in Switzerland led to the treaty of Ouchy signed on October 17, 1912. By this treaty, Turkey resigned its authority over Tripoli and Cyrenaica, without recognizing Italian sovereignty. Thus, the Libyan Arab people were granted 'de facto' independence by Turkey.

The struggle against the Italian invaders was then continued by the Libyan people, who, although short of modern weapons, by 1914 had confined the occupying forces to Tripoli and to a few coastal sites. The Libyan Arab people, rising in revolt against the invaders were to be first people in the

whole world to suffer from a new form of warfare – airborne bombardment.

Failing to destroy the valiant defenders with normal military methods using infantry, cavalry and artillery, the Italian High Command sent its fledgling air force to the deserts of Libya.

The aircrafts used were of the Etrich, Framer, Morane and Bleriot types which at the time were the most modern. Observation balloons and three airships, manned by officers and men from the Italian Navy, were also sent to Libya. The Italian aggressors were to claim several 'aviation firsts' against the suffering Libyan people.

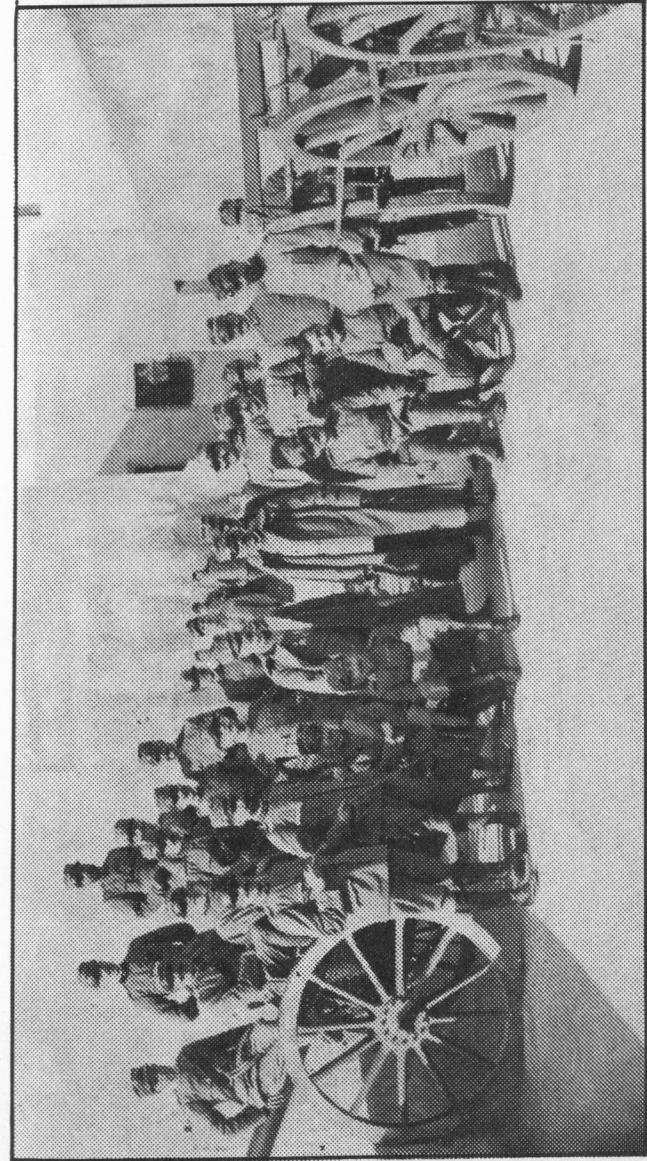
The first air reconnaissance against an enemy took place on October 23rd, 1911 manned by Captain Carlo Piazza flying a Bleriot aircraft, a type similar to the one designed and built by the Louis Bleriot, who first flew across the English Channel. The first ever bombing mission was carried out on November 1, 1911 by Sotto-Tenente (sub-Lieutenant) Gavotti when he bombed Tagiura and Ain Zara. Gavotti flew an Etrich aircraft commonly called a "Taube" or Dove because of the similarity of its wings to that of a dove. The first direction from the air for artillery fire took place on the following day, on November 2, 1911 by Captain Moizo. On February 22, 1912, Captain Piazza carried out the first ever photographic reconnaissance mission. The first night flight in a war zone was carried out on March 4th 1912 by Captain Piazza and Gavotti, the latter by then promoted from the rank of Sub-Lieutenant (Sotto Tenete) to Lieutenant (Tenente).

One of the first targets to be hit during the first bombing raid on Ain Zara was a hospital which was clearly marked as such. In a short period of time two of the three airships flew 127 missions, dropping 330 bombs and taking more than 300 reconnaissance photographs over Tripolitania.

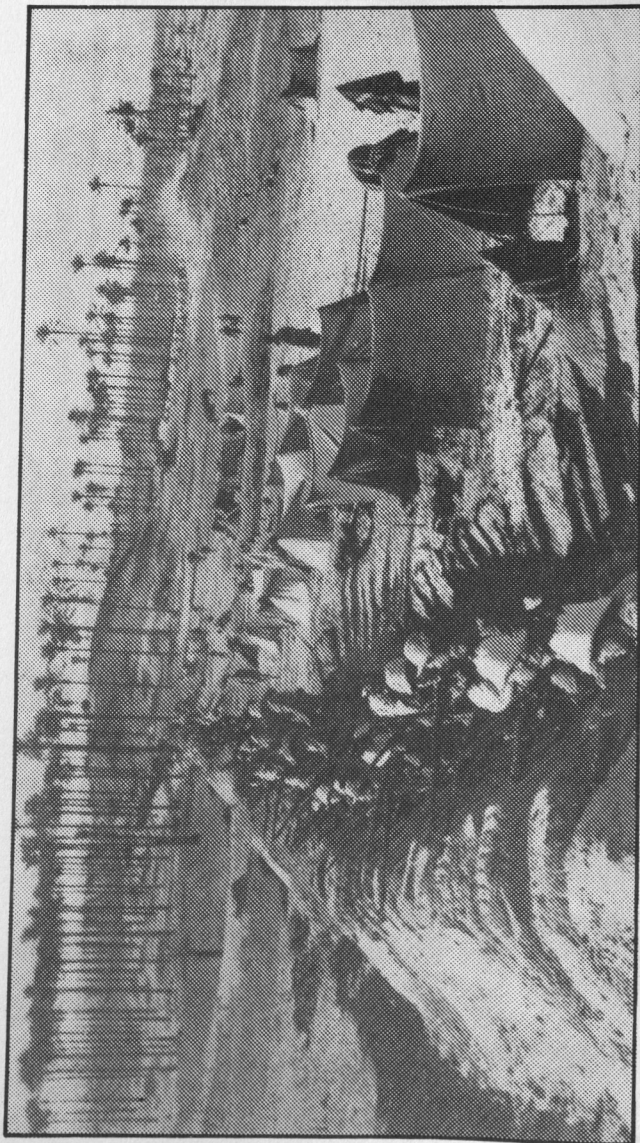
Although the first raid had a terrifying effect on the Libyan Arab fighters, most of whom had never even seen an aircraft before, let alone one which dropped bombs, it was soon realized that their effect was not devastating. However, the aircraft had proved useful for reconnaissance and for pinpointing enemy troop concentrations permitting counter measures to be taken in time. Whilst this was useful during the big regular battles in the early stages of the war, the Libyan Arabs' great ability to use their natural surroundings for hiding during the period of guerilla warfare, nullified much of the aircrafts' and airships' importance.

In fact, Italian military reports at the time stated that enemy reaction was quite effective to such an extent that it had forced the airships to fly higher than 1,300 metres

proving that the Arabs soon lost their fear of these new methods of warfare and were retaliating.



General Caneva and his staff in Tripoli a few days after the invasion, with captured Turkish cannons.



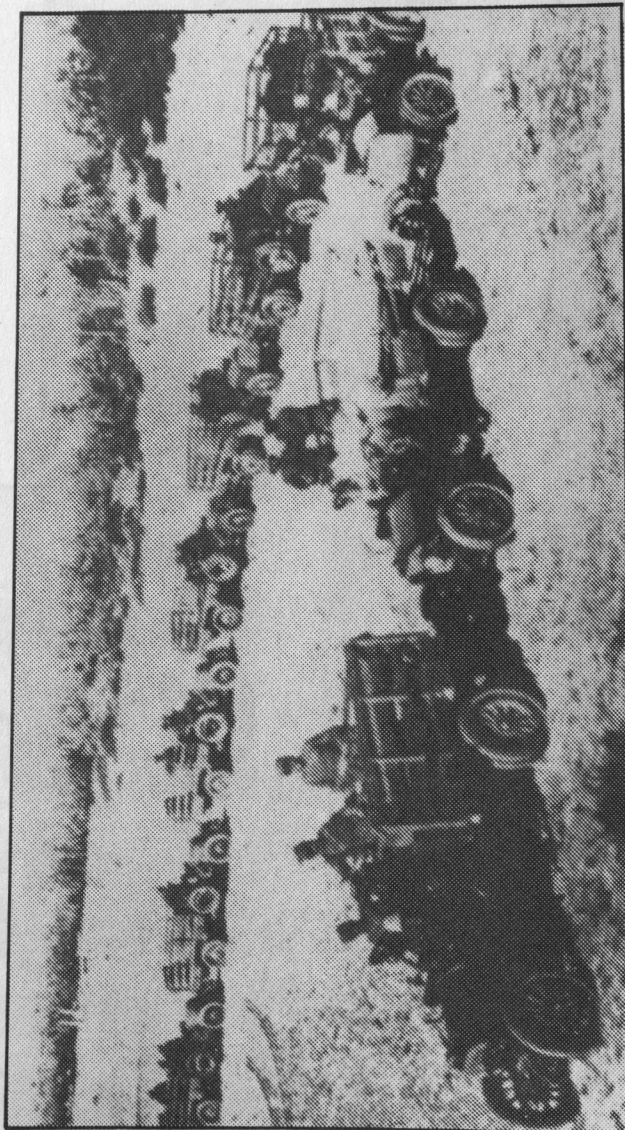
Italian troops in their trenches outside Ain Zara seen on the alert against a Libyan attack.



An Italian artillery position. It was a war of cannon, tanks and machine guns against flint locks and camels.



Italian artillery in action on Libyan soil.



An Italian Army motorised column engaged in operations against the Libyan Freedom fighters in 1912.

1915 – BRITISH AND FRENCH INTERVENTION

In 1915, the great European powers had been at war for over a year. Germany, Austro-Hungary and Turkey were aligned one side whilst Britain, France and Tzarist-Russia were on the other. That year, the Italian monarch Vittorio Emmanuele, who had previously declared so piously that he did not love war, had involved his suffering country in another military disaster declaring war on the so-called Central Powers, that is Germany, Austro-Hungary and Turkey. The character of the Italian King can be gauged by the fact that he declared war on nations with which he had signed a treaty of friendship and alliance only a few years earlier.

In secret negotiations, Britain and France had promised Italy, Tyrol, Trieste and Fiume, territories belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Italy unscrupulously aligned itself with Britain and France, declaring war against former allies. The price the country had to pay was over two million in casualties, including 650,000 dead. Italy had gained nothing. But, on the other hand, someone did gain from this war. The big industrialists had a thriving business. The Ansaldo armament concern saw a rise in its capital assets from 30 million to 500 million Italian Lire in the two years prior to 1918. The same could be said for FIAT whose capital assets rose from 17 million to 200 million lire.

Across the Mediterranean and for the Libyan people, the Italian involvement in the war made Britain and France allies with Italy. Thus the Italians who were, still trying without success to subdue the Libyan uprising were aided by the French and British who were soon to join the ranks of the revolution's enemies. In fact, in November 1915, some Libyan freedom-fighters spilled over the border into Egypt thus giving an excuse for British military operations against the Libyans.

A British force, four-battalion strong and supported by four regiments of cavalry, armoured cars, artillery and aircraft took to the field against the Libyans and the first clash took place on December 11th. The British claimed eighty Libyans dead and captured several weapons which a British report described as *"ranging from a few modern Italian rifles to obsolete muzzle loaders and elephant guns."* In spite of the British superiority in weapons, the Libyans fought back heroically and in this first operation the Imperialists lost fifteen men and one officer.

Other battles followed and the British armoured cars and heavy artillery were decisive in killing many Libyans who were mostly armed with obsolete weapons. In another clash, which took place on the coast, the British were also supported by the guns of a warship and killed, according to their claims, 300 Arabs. More British troops were sent to reinforce those already fighting the Libyans.....and the killings continued. With the Libyans retreating further into the desert, the British could no longer spare the necessary number of troops, which, in their opinion, was essential in beating the Arabs for what they considered as a "side show" to the Big War. Because of this situation the fighting petered out.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the country, in Tunisia and Algeria stood France, then the second biggest imperial power after Britain. Some years previously, France had encouraged Italy to invade Libya while negotiations and subsequently an agreement took place between France and Spain for the carving up of Morocco.

The time came when France was ruling over an empire in the African continent stretching from the Mediterranean shores to the Congo, overlorded over millions of Moslems. Imperialist France looked on with apprehension as the success of the Libyan struggle against Italian occupation gathered momentum. A major pre-occupation of France was that her Moslem subjects might follow the Libyan example.

By the end of 1914, the well-led Libyans achieved great success over the Italians whose occupation of the Fezzan and the Libyan oases was just a few months old. By June 1915, Italy was forced to evacuate the whole interior of Libya and her troops were bottled up in Tripoli, Homs and some coastal centres. The garrisons in Sebha, Ghadames, Nalout and other centres in the interior of the country could not retreat to the coast. Rather than face annihilation at the hands of the Libyan forces, these garrisons were forced to withdraw to the French posts of the Eastern Hoggar. This and earlier Arab clashes with the French detachments on the shores of Lake Chad increased French fear of the spread of the Arab Revolution.

In turn, this led to fighting between French troops and the Libyan rebels along and across the border with Tunisia. The fighting, which up to 1915 involved nearly 15,000 French soldiers, was difficult and arduous, as a French report had described. Between 1916 and 1918 the Libyans, already engaged in fighting the British on the Egyptian border also had to face a renewed offensive by the Italians. So only small bands of Libyans could be spared to face the French across

the Tunisian border whilst the French Command could employ the most modern weapons available including lorries armed with machine guns operating in close liaison with aircraft.

The experience of the British in Egypt and even of the Italians around Tripoli had in fact proved the worth of aircraft reconnaissance in the desert. The first French squadron landed in Tunisia on July 10, 1916. The squadron's aircraft, fitted with machine-guns and capable of carrying bombs, operated over a range of 125 miles in liaison with the lorries equipped with still more machine-guns.

"Combined attacks against the centres and hide outs of the Libyan rebels produced excellent results and operations (by the Freedom fighters) slowed down", ran one French report which was released rather prematurely.

Prematurely is the correct word to describe such a report for, despite these military tactics, Libyan pressure in the Hoggar remained active and in the course of the summer of 1916, it proved necessary to evacuate several French border posts. This facilitated the infiltration of what was described as small audacious bands who harried posts and attacked detachments. These Libyan guerilla tactics made it very difficult for the French to supply their posts. In fact, every attempt at supply involved a major operation with the supply detachments being heavily escorted by fighting troops to ensure that part of the supplies arrive safely.

This constant withdrawal from French positions alarmed the French Government. Heavy reinforcements were rushed in and the Libyan popular resistance held its positions across the Tunisian border. The strengthened French garrisons also served to keep the local people in check.



THE RISE OF ITALIAN FASCISM

With the defeat of the Central Powers in 1918, Italy could turn its full attention to Libya. Thousands of troops and a large number of aircraft were rushed there to settle once and for all a war that was originally planned to last for only a few days.

However, the Libyan people fought on and in 1919 an attempt was made to force the people into reaching a peaceful solution. This failed, and a general revolt forced the advancing Italian troops back to the coastal cities where they were to remain until the beginning of 1922.

The infamous Fascist General Rodolfo Graziani, in his book *Ho Difeso La Patria* which he wrote after World War II in his own defense said, *"All over North Africa, Italian prestige was seriously humiliated by the Arab Revolt. Our occupation was reduced to the coast, that is to the three centres of Homs, Tripoli and Zuara."*

"In the years 1919 and 1920, the democratic governments tried in vain to raise our prestige, offering reforms and concessions. Every attempt failed because the rebel leader would not accept to recognize in any way, Italian sovereignty. These attempts resulted in more grace humiliations to the dignity of the Italian nation."

"Count Volpi, the new Italian Governor General of Tripoli, was a man to accept only administrative duties. He could not accept that, a few rebel leaders continue to inflict mortal blows to the honour of the nation."

Leading motorized columns against the Libyan freedom fighters, Graziani had to admit that the occupation of Libya was not a walkover. Among the examples he mentions, was the advance against Giosc, which was occupied on June 12th of 1922 after violent combat against the Arabs, who were awaiting the Italians. Graziani wrote that the rebels were still **"cocky and confident"** after their easy successes against the Italian forces in the same zone in 1915.

By the end of 1923, the whole Northern region was re-occupied and in 1925, the Sirtica was occupied. The Southern regions were placed under the command of General Graziani. However, it was only in 1928 that the Italians felt they were strong enough to occupy the hinterland with the final occupation of the Fezzan taking place in 1930, nineteen years after the start of the war.

The land was occupied but the people were still not

subdued. Despite Italy's barbarous and uncivilized methods of warfare which shocked every fellow imperialist, the struggle against the invader went on. It was a struggle mainly carried out in the form of guerilla warfare masterminded by the man the Libyans lovingly call **"The Lion of the desert"**, the great Omar Mukhtar.

In 1929, Marshal Pietro Badoglio assumed the duties of Governor General of Libya. *"When he arrived in the colony he made a declaration to the Arab population in which he promised peace, tranquility and prosperity to those who submit to the authority of the Government whilst death, destruction and ruin would come to those who remained rebellious."* Graziani further wrote: *"As the attempts at conciliation, though in a miserable way led to more humiliation for the Italians, Badoglio was forced to apply the second part of his declaration; that of severity."*

It was ordered by the Governor General to execute summarily all those who belonged to the armed rebel bands and who dared reply with threats to the Governor General's generous invitation. To cut off the rebels from the help of their fellow Libyans, the people were herded into concentration camps. The fight against Omar El Mukhtar led to draconian measures and the application of severe penalties against those who supplied arms, munitions, food, and other aid to the rebels."

The removal of the people into camps situated in areas unsuitable for pasture and the life of the people caused inevitable losses and suffering to the people and their herds." These are Graziani's remarks when trying to gloss over the fact that these measures led to the death of thousands of Libyans in concentration camps and trying to minimize his own responsibility in this tragedy.

Retribution for helping the rebels was harsh and immediate. Those who escaped the hangman's noose or the firing squad were destined for a life of suffering. They were huddled like herds and sent to concentration camps, the three main ones being in Soluch, El Magrun and Al Abiar. Mass hangings were the order of the day and a common occurrence. The Italians looked upon this as a deterrent, so much so that during the struggle for freedom, the entire Bedouin population of 300,000 was interned in these camps. Two-thirds of them never left alive.

Exhaustion was the main force that hampered Omar El Mukhtar and his men. He had fought a resistance war against overwhelming odds. His band never numbered more than one

thousand freedom-fighters. With this small army he took on the entire Italian force.

Besides, his men were divided into small groups of between one hundred and three hundred men. They came from tribes that were often feuding with each other. Omar El Mukhtar kept the peace among them; he also succeeded in wielding them into a loyal body believing in one common cause – the liberation of their occupied homeland.

As time dragged on, food was getting scarce and harder to obtain and on one occasion there was a skirmish with Italian troops as the guerrillas tried to reach a supply dump. In the trampled sand, a soldier accidentally came over Mukhtar's metal rimmed reading glasses – today a relic housed in one of Tripoli's museums. Times grew even harder for the rebels. The Italian fascists destroyed the Libyans' herds and confiscated what food stores were left.

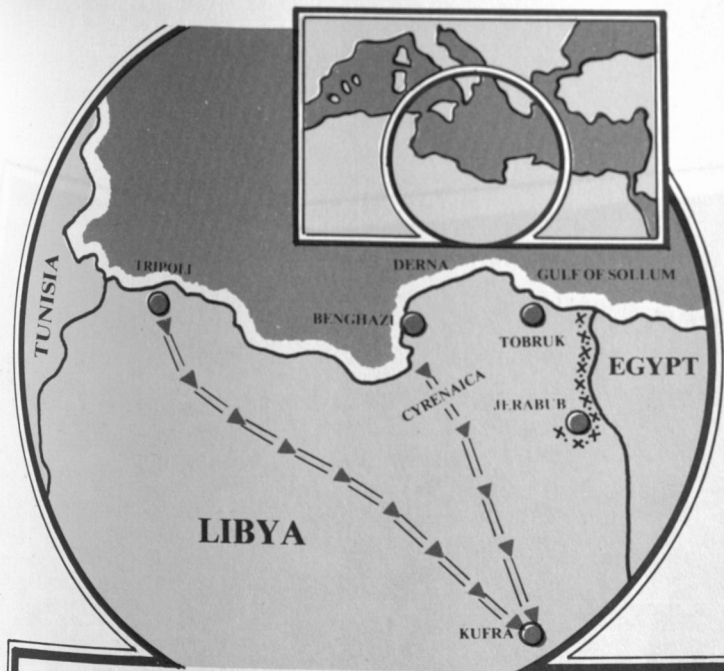
Between May and September of 1924, for example, 800 Bedouins were killed and 12,000 sheep and goats were destroyed. On the 11th of September 1931, Omar El Mukhtar and twelve of his men were surrounded by Fascist troops. His men died in the ensuing skirmish. Mukhtar himself, then 76 years old, was overpowered and captured alive.

The next day, following a hastily convened, sham military trial, Omar El Mukhtar was sentenced to death by hanging. His hanging was executed on the very same day the trial ended. Witness to it were 20,000 people. With the death of Mukhtar, the Italians breathed a sigh of relief, believing that the war of conquest was now over. It turned out to be a premature sigh of relief for although the tempo of the war was somewhat reduced, Libyan popular guerrilla resistance was far from over.

The Italian massacres caused thousands of Libyan Arabs to flee across the borders to the safety of Egypt where they took refuge living in camps reminiscent of today's camps where thousands of Palestinians are living, having become victims of Zionist aggression and occupation of their homeland.

From across the Egyptian border, guerrilla raids were launched against the Italian occupation forces. In a useless attempt to quell these incursions, the Commander of the Italian Fascist Forces in Libya, General Rodolfo Graziani ordered the construction of several hundred miles of wire fence along the border between the two countries.

This fence failed to achieve its aim and the incursion continued unabatingly. Other Libyan Arabs harassed the Italian forces from their mountain retreats within Libya itself.



A ROUTE FOR GENOCIDE

Within a month of their invasion of Libya in 1911, the Italians had captured Tripoli, Benghazi, Derna and Tobruk.

The routes taken by the two Italian armies to Kufra – one from Cyrenaica and one from Tripoli. Graziani was the first general to take a modern mechanised force of tanks, armoured cars and bombers into the desert and his 1931 campaign through the southern Sahara was considered a military marvel of its time.

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To cut off escape by the Bedouin and vital supplies from neighbouring Egypt, Graziani builds his own "Roman Wall" – an impenetrable barbed wire fence 400 kilometres long stretching from the Gulf of Sollum to the shifting sands below Jerabub. The fence ensured the ultimate defeat of Omar Mukhtar's forces.



Armed with the most out-dated arms at the time, the Libyan Arab people fought and resisted from the very beginning the Fascist occupation of Libya.



Libyan Popular forces, although heavily out-numbered and unarmed fought against the foreign occupation of their soil — for them the most valuable weapon was and still is their strong belief in freedom.

A NEW WORLD WAR AND NEW ALLIES

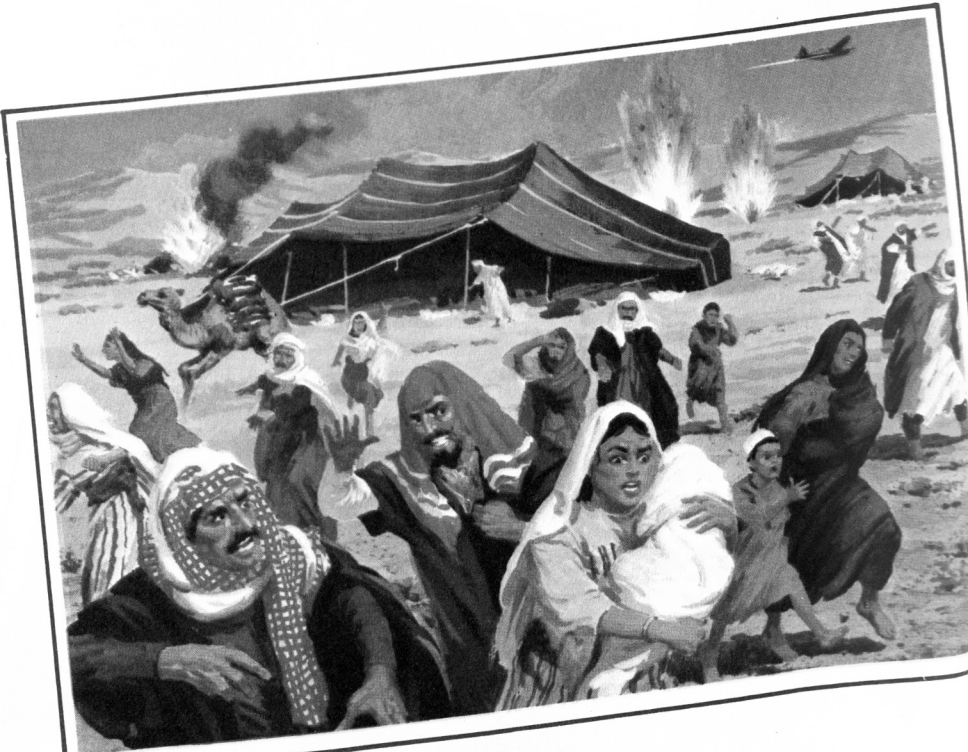
Following the rise of Fascism in Italy, the regime, basing itself more on the glory of the Roman past, exerted all efforts to occupy Libya. Although they succeeded in conquering the country, they failed miserably in subduing the people. This Italian failure came about in spite of the regime's full use of its best military leaders, thousands of troops and vast amounts of modern equipment. Besides, their conquering, if conquering is the right term that should be employed, only came about after nineteen years of war.

The 1920's had seen the rise of Fascism in Italy whilst the 1930's saw the rise of Nazism in Germany with the world gradually drifting towards another World War.

It was a war which began in September, 1939 with the Nazi invasion of Poland. There followed lightning aggression which resulted in the Nazi occupation of Norway, Holland and Belgium and the eventual invasion of France. With France on the verge of capitulation, Italy – like a jackal planning to eat the remains of the lion's feast – decided that Nazi Germany would be the eventual victor. Through this reasoning, the Italian Fascist regime, in June 1940, declared war on Britain and her allies, hoping to share the spoils with Nazi Germany. Libya thus entered the theatre of warfare with the local populace having no option but to ally themselves with the British in fighting against the Italians, then occupying their homeland.

Britain was hard pressed on every front. British military officers came with the idea of recruiting a force from amongst the thousands of Libyan refugees living in Egyptian camps. Three months' time saw the creation of the 3,000 strong Libyan Arab Force. The "superior" mentality embedded in the British military brass was still quite evident. British Middle East Headquarters mistrusted the fighting capabilities of the Libyan Arabs, despite the fact that many of them had more experience in battle than any of the British troops, having been in military action since as far back as 1911, at the outset of the Italian invasion. Thus British Middle East Headquarters decided on charging the Libyan Arab Force with guard duties far from the action.

Another British military organization, the Occupied Enemy Territory Administration, considered the Libyan force from a political angle and planned to use it as a police force in Cyrenaica during the British occupation. This organization finally decided the matter and the Libyan Arab Force ended



The Libyan Arab people were the first victims in history to suffer air bombardment.

up as a gendarmerie. In spite of all these somewhat acceptable "concessions", the British authorities still looked down on the Libyan Arab Force. This attitude can be deduced from the following incident regarding what footwear was most suitable for the Arabs – whether sandals or army boots? The Arabs had no doubts at all as to this matter. Coming from a country of sharp rocks, boots were what they were used to and sandals were as strange to them as roller skates. But still they were not consulted in the matter.

The question of weapons for the Libyan Arab Force was more serious but was also treated in the most irresponsible manner by the British authorities. The pool of 300 British rifles which was all that Middle East Headquarters allotted to the 3,000 men force, was withdrawn and replaced by an unlimited supply of Italian weapons. But these were in a shocking condition so much so that, in most cases, they turned out to be more dangerous to the user than to the target.

The British Officers attached to the Libyan Arab Force were the most incompetent that could be found in the British Army for the Middle East. One documented incident proves this point. A British company commander was asked whether an Italian machine gun manned by his Libyan troops, who were at the time facing a possible German attack, would actually fire when the time came. He replied that the machine gun doesn't fire.

"Do the men know it?" he was asked.

"I expect they do but it will confidence them to have an automatic weapon", quipped the British officer.

The Libyan Arab Force was thus not employed as a unit in the field of battle. This was certainly not to the liking of the men who had enlisted to fight against the hated Italians. Many eventually volunteered for hazardous operations behind enemy lines. They served with such commando units as the Long Range Desert Group, the Special Air Services and with Vladimir Peniakoff's "Popski's Private Army."

The original military designation of the latter organization was the Libyan Arab Force Commando Group. Initially it was composed of twenty-two other ranking Libyans, one British Sergeant, and one Libyan officer with its originator Peniakoff, being also its commander.

The aim of the Libyan Commando Group was to build up a network of intelligence covering the Jebel Akhdar mountain ranges or the Green Mountains of Cyrenaica. They were also entrusted with carrying out sabotage operations against the

all important fuel dumps, so crucial to the North African campaign.

Helped by Arab guides, Peniakoff and his group met many Arab tribes and leaders in rendezvous behind enemy lines. Their policy, which was passed on to the Arab leaders, was not to conduct any military operations which would lead to Italian reprisals. Such operations by the Libyan tribes were to be halted until the British High Command gave the go-ahead. Instead they were asked to gather and supply information regarding all enemy movements.

Describing one such meeting with the Arabs that took place only seven or eight miles from the nearest enemy position, Peniakoff was to write in his memoirs that **"it seemed hardly possible that the enemy should be unaware of my games and miss an opportunity of putting an end to British subversive activities. The Italians had held the coast of Cyrenaica for over twenty-five years – since 1929 they controlled the whole of the interior. they had large settlements dotted over the fertile part of the Jebel. They should have known what was going on in this their virtually own territory. Surely at any moment now armoured cars would appear over the hills and wipe out our gathering. But nothing happened – a tribute to the loyalty and craftiness of the Libyan Arabs."**

Peniakoff also described a very successful attack on an Italian fuel dump which gives some indication of the courage of the Libyan Arab people living under fascist occupation.

Peniakoff had asked his Arab helpers to find him large fuel dumps. **"To prevent heart searchings which the prospects of reprisals might cause, I led everybody to believe that the petrol dumps, when found, would be bombed from the air."** Some days later, he received information of a petrol dump at Al-Qubba, known to the Italians as Giovanni Berta. After a personal reconnaissance, and accompanied by the man who had given him the information, a Libyan by the name of Mohammed Al-Obeidi, Peniakoff decided to blow up the dump.

All this time, Al-Obeidi provided guidance, shelter, and food to the British saboteur and his team, which included several Libyan Arabs.

Peniakoff was to write: **"It must be realized that not I, but Mohammed, was the man who risked his life in this adventure: if the worst happened I would become an honourable prisoner-of-war but my friend would have had a good chance of ending his life strung up by an iron hook through**

the jaw. For such was the kindly Italian method of dealing with disaffected Arabs."

When Mohammed realized that the dump was not going to be bombed by aircraft, but would be blown up by Popski's Private Army, he protested strongly for fear of reprisals against the Arab populace since the Italians would obviously conclude that the sabotage operation was carried out by the Arabs. Obeidi's family and friends had their tents erected close and around el Qubba. With the successful outcome of the sabotage operation, those dearest to him, would end up having to pay the penalty. Some would be hanged, others deported and their cattle taken from them, whereby they would face starvation.

But the main complaint lodged by Mohammed was that the British Officer did not take the Arab into his confidence and trust him, since Peniakoff's true intentions were concealed. When the British Officer finally admitted his plan that he would be blowing up the fuel dump, it was still Obeidi himself who volunteered to help and practically took over the actual planning and execution of the whole operation.

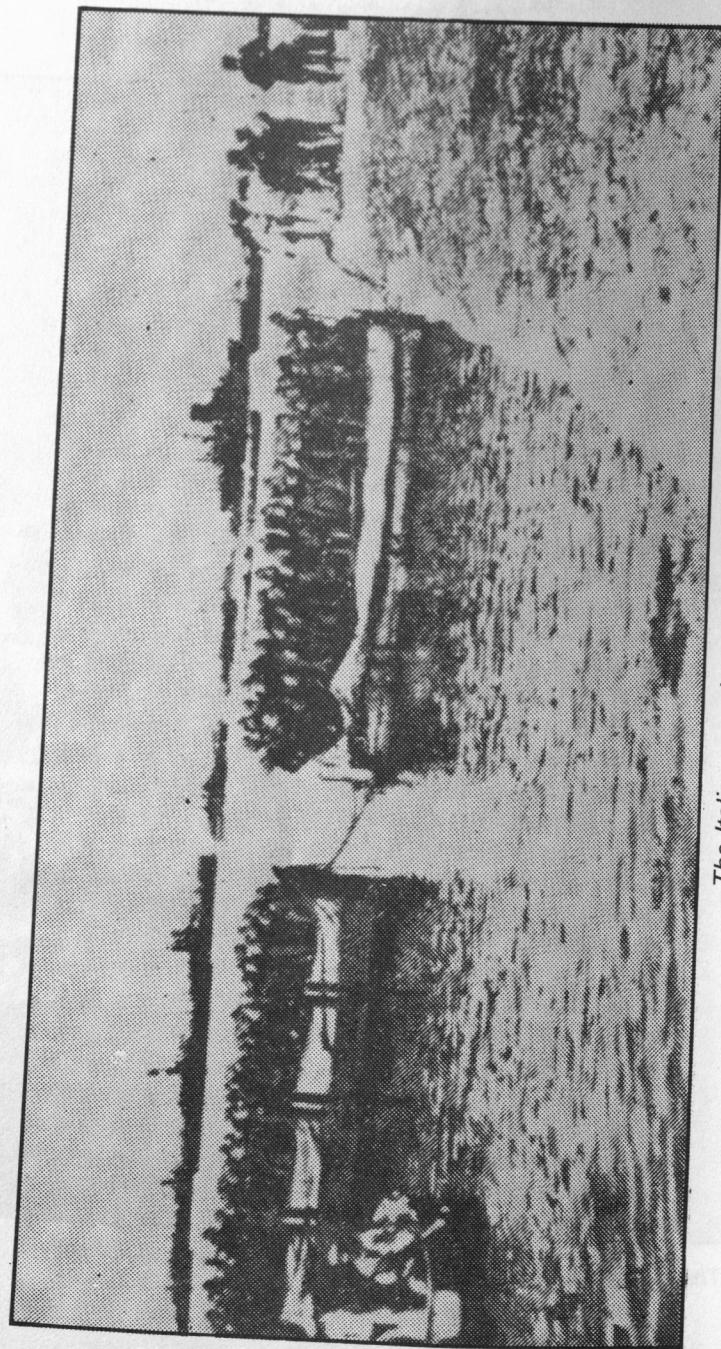
Peniakoff wrote, ***"He was my master in the art of war...we adhered strictly to Mohammed el Obeidi's schedule. The dump was successfully blown up and the enemy lost some 100,000 gallons of vital fuel. We purposely left enough evidence behind us for the Italians to realize that it was a British raiding party that destroyed the dump."***

Such similar operations behind enemy lines, was of the utmost significance and importance towards the final Allied victory over the Fascist and Nazi forces in North Africa. Fuel was the scarcest and most precious commodity of all and had to be convoyed or air lifted from Europe across the Mediterranean. No one of course had then realized that oil was just a few metres beneath the ground they were standing on and on the very land which they had turned into one great battle-field.

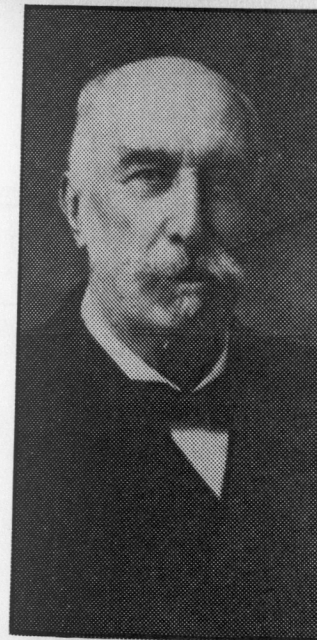
The lack of fuel was the main reason which prevented the Nazi Afrika Korps from reaching the Suez Canal and conquering Egypt. Arab attacks against fuel and supply dumps behind enemy lines proved to be a very valuable help to the Allies in the North African campaign.



The first Italian military expedition departing for Libya in 1911.



The Italian armada invading Tripoli.



Giovanni Giolitti, the Italian politician who controlled the Italian Government and launched the war against Turkey and the invasion of Libya.



Benito Mussolini — He empowered Graziani to annihilate the Libyan freedom-fighters.



UMBERTO
CAGNI



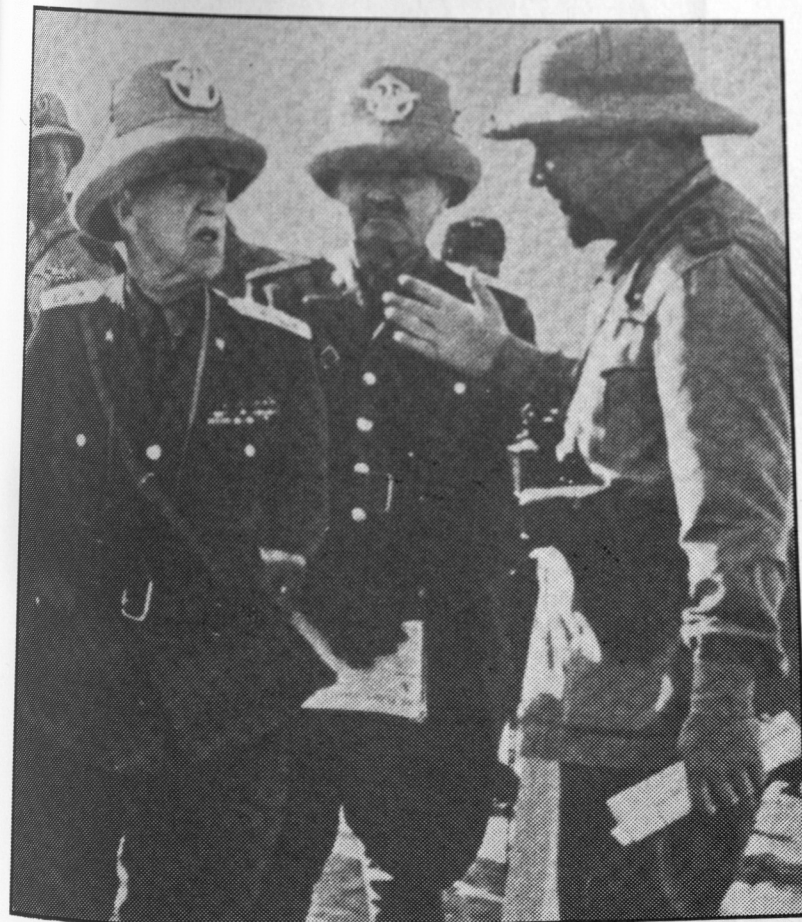
PIETRO
BADOGLIO



RODOLFO
GRAZIANI



EMILIO
DE BONO



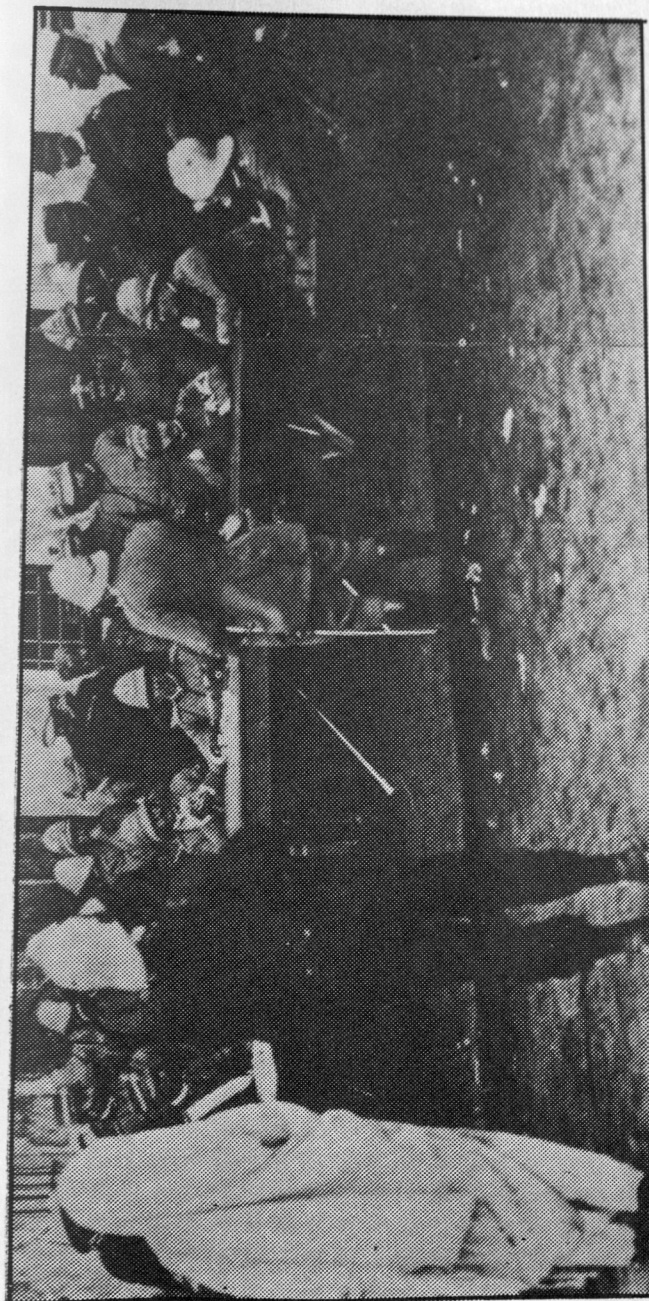
1940 – Italy's last monarch, King Vittorio Emanuele, conferring in Libya with General Balbo during the Second World War.



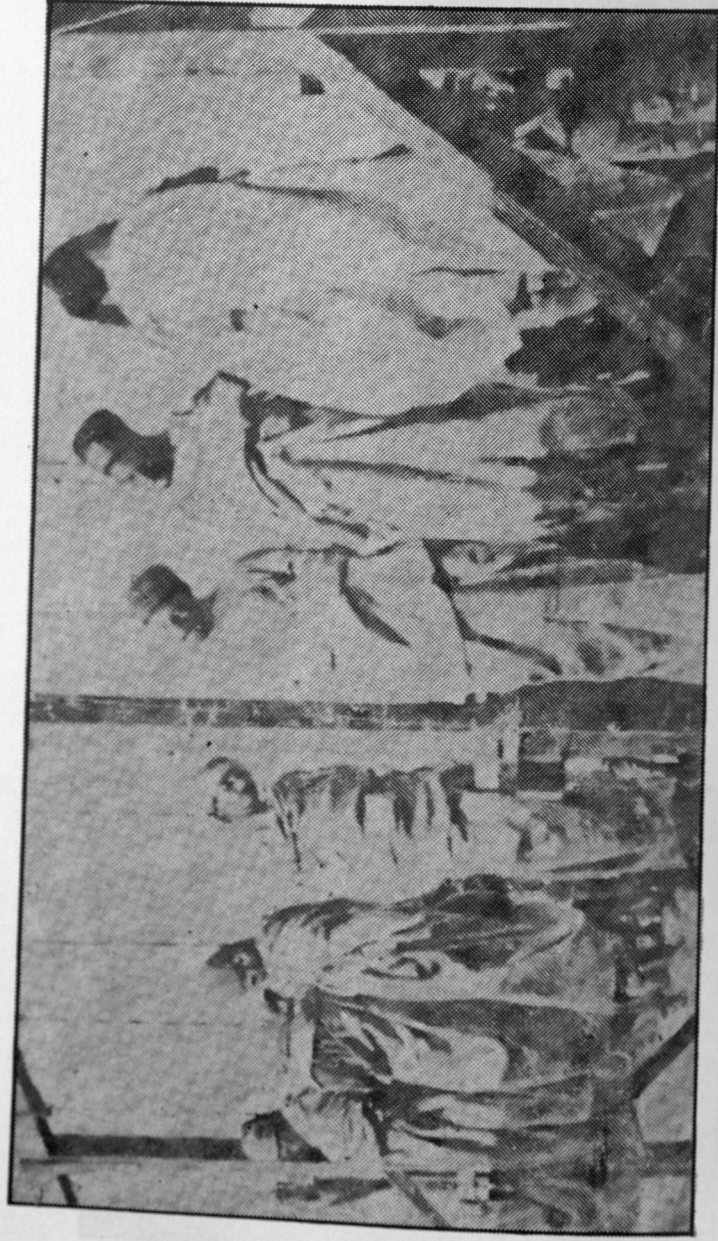
Massacres galore — the results of Italy's attempts to "civilise" Libya.



Italian military vehicles which were used for "herding" innocent Libyans to a life of misery in fascist concentration camps.



The Italians established military tribunals in Libya often resulting in the imprisonment or hanging of Libyans who sought freedom.



The price they had to pay – a sham military trial and death by hanging.



The Italians had a passion for recording on film every event of the era. Omar Mukhtar is seen in chains, surrounded by a group of dignitaries all anxious to have their presence at this historical event recorded for posterity.



Omar Al-Mukhtar – fought 260 battles against the foreign invaders between 1911-1931. Born in 1858 he was hanged by the Italian Fascists on 16th September 1931, following his capture.

BEHIND ENEMY LINES

The part played by the Libyan Arab people in the defeat of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy finds confirmation in several reports emanating from the Nazis and Fascists themselves. A German account speaks of a man in a tattered barnous far behind the lines in Tripolitania.

"He was known as Mohammed Ali but was in fact a Libyan spy from the Long Range Desert Group." A German military policeman had nailed a sheet on the door of a house and German and Italian soldiers crowded round, shouting for somebody to read it out. Mohammed Ali, who could speak German as good as any Berliner, opened his eyes and pricked his ears. He heard something incredible. Only the day before, British agents had sent a radio message to Cairo reporting information that Erwin Rommel, the Nazi commander, was to retreat."

The paper nailed to the door was Rommel's Order of the Day announcing his offensive against the Allies. Mohammed's message was the first inking the British had of this offensive before the German Afrika Korps struck their front line. While all this was going on, several Libyan groups carried out raids and guerilla warfare against the Fascists behind enemy lines. For example, a report from a German combat group dated December, 1941 told how suddenly they saw what looked like tents. It was an Arab group and they were firing from a kneeling position at Italian aircraft on a desert airfield.

Some tribes kept their part of the country for a long time fairly free of Italian or German troops. Aircraft had to be used against them and special Italian mountain troops, the Alpini, were gathered to attack them. The Arabs had to break off operations and retire to their mountain fastness.

With the fall of Tobruk and the British retreat into Egypt, the Italians felt strong enough to take reprisals against the Arabs, executing several including many innocents. Peniakoff of the Libyan Arab Forces Comandos sent a warning to the Italian Commander Generale Piatti, threatening him that one Italian officer will be shot for every Libyan executed.

Peniakoff then attached a list of Libyan Arabs executed from the 21st of January, 1942 to the 1st of August, 1942. This list wrote Peniakoff *"included the names of several*

of my local helpers who had fallen in the hands of the Italians after the fall of Tobruk and our retreat across the Egyptian border has given heart to the Italian bullies who administered Cyrenaica".

The method the Italians employed to put to death Arabs suspected of helping the British was to hang them by a steel hook inserted in the jaw and leave them to die of shock.

The savage war in North Africa between the Nazis and Fascists on the one side and the Allies on the other also resulted in the virtual destruction of Libya's cities, towns, and villages. Such destruction led to the death of thousands of citizens, many of whom were forced by the occupying powers, Fascist or Allies, to help in the clearing of bomb damage, the unloading of munition supplies from ships, and other hazardous work.

For example, in May 1941, the huge Italian liner Birmania lay in Tripoli harbour with a cargo of ammunition. On May 4th, two explosions were heard and huge black clouds of smoke rose from the harbour. The Birmania had blown up. Another ship, the "Citta di Bari" lying alongside the Birmania and carrying a cargo of petrol, also blew up.

At the time of the explosions the unloading operation from the Birmania was underway with countless Arabs, and a few Germans and Italians on the dock. Casualties were appalling. Well over one hundred fifty Arabs lost their lives less than half that number in Germans and Italians died. These figures were apart from the yet greater number of injured personnel.

The fate of the cities and towns of Libya has been vividly described in reports and publications. A German report had stated *"The British garrison in Benghazi was doomed. The British Commander sent his demolition squads into action."*

The fall of Tobruk and the Nazi General Rommel's triumphant entry into this city was described in the following terms:

"On the morning of June 21st, at 0500 hrs, Rommel entered the city of Tobruk at the head of his combat group. He found a pile of ruins. Hardly a house remained intact. The mosque was only slightly damaged, but apart from this, the harbour installations and the streets were transformed into a maze of rubble. In the basin lay the wrecks of several ships...masts and funnels rose pathetically above the surface."

The German report described Rommel's reaction on seeing the destruction left by the British demolition squads as

furious.

The Allies then started to re-organize and grow stronger militarily. They launched a counter attack forcing the Nazis out of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, with the result that the foreign occupation of the Libyan cities once again changed hands.

The German's retreat was repetitive of the British retreat. Rommel's demolition squads were put to work and there was not the least sign that Nazi General Rommel was in any way furious at the work of his squads.

The British official history of the Royal Air Force in the Middle East (HMSO, London, 1945) reported:

"On November 21st, 1942, our forces entered Benghazi, a city bombed to hell, deserted by all save but a few Arabs who still wandered among the ruins."

The Nazis even boasted publicly about the destruction which their soldiers carried out in Libya. Announcing the loss of Tripoli, Lord Haw-Haw, a British citizen who betrayed his own country and joined the Nazi forces by broadcasting propaganda against Britain from Germany, said that Tripoli harbour was so well blocked that the Allies would need months to pull a ship through.

The British officer, in charge of salvage and clearing operations in Tripoli harbour was to comment that:

"Across the narrow entrance of the harbour between the tips of the Eastern and Western moles, lay no less than seven blockships, jammed close together and sunk to the upperworks. I was shortly to discover that they probably formed the most thorough piece of port blockage in history."

The Germans have been working on the lot for months. They filled every one of the ships with steel reinforcement rods, old machinery, bits of trailers, unserviceable lorries - any old junk that they could lay their hands upon. Then they poured tons of concrete on top. The ships were also mined and booby-trapped to make salvage operations even more dangerous."

However, Tripoli harbour and other harbours, airports, and facilities which were useful to the execution of the war, were gradually cleared as the war left the Southern shores of the Mediterranean and moved to the shores of Europe.



THE DESTRUCTION OF A COUNTRY

The North African war waged between the Fascists and Nazis and the Allied Powers led to the virtual destruction of Libya's towns and villages. It was a war which left in its wake the death of thousands of innocents.

The war also brought in its aftermath a new form of imperialism, neo-colonialism, which secured countries to serve the interest of the Imperialists. World War II was an event which signalled off the end of direct colonialism. The colonized peoples who fought in the war under the banner of freedom and liberty, and whose efforts and sacrifices were of the utmost contribution to the Allied victory, found one form of imperialism substituted by another more insidious form. Not content to sit by and watch the slaves being re-enslaved, the peoples of the so-called "**Third World**" rose up to fight in battles of national liberation which quickly spread throughout Asia and Africa.

In order to contain the revolution, the former colonial powers tried to pre-empt it by granting former colonies **nominal** independence which allowed imperialist access to wealth, natural resources, and strategic situations. Once this was ensured, the Imperialist powers worked in various ways to tighten the web ensnaring the now 'independent' colonies. One such system which proved to be quite effective, was the system of alliances, set-up to 'defend' the so-called free world from the rising tide of communism.

In former colonies where collaborators were not readily found, the Imperialist powers did not hesitate to install their own puppet regimes. Money in the form of aid was freely distributed to the former colonies. This was purely a means of helping them develop their economy in such a way as to commit and bind them to the Imperialist's economies, thus making them dependent economically, and at times even politically and socially dependent. The Imperialists' next move was to grant sham independence to a series of monarchies and other reactionary regimes. One typical case in point was Libya.

Meanwhile the United States of America was fast taking the place of France, Britain and other European countries as the world's leading Imperialist power. This led to attempts towards the formation of a Middle East defense organisation which was in direct conflict with Nasser's revolution. This prompted the United States to step-up its activity in the Mediterranean region and the Middle East and it was soon

setting up military bases, fomenting reactionary coups and propping up conservative regimes by means of defense agreements and financial assistance.

It was during this period that the monarchy in Libya handed over the country's independence to the British and Americans who set-up their military bases, to be used against Egypt and other progressive countries. With the revolution gaining support everywhere, the monarchy in Libya was putting the final touches on an agreement with Britain which gave her the military base of El Adem. This agreement also gave the British access to Tripoli harbour as well as other airstrips useful in relaying British military personnel to East Africa, the Indian Ocean island bases, and the Far East.

Shortly afterwards, the United States established its own military presence in Libya and in September 1954, an agreement was signed by which the large American military base at Wheelus was legalized and confirmed. In addition, the Americans were given access to Watiya airfield near the Tunisian border; Tajura base near Tripoli was set-up as a radio and radar monitoring station; the base at Bir El Osta as an ammunition and nuclear arms depot while Ras Lanuf became a naval station of the U.S. Sixth Fleet. All these bases formed a formidable link in the United States' international military network and their surveillance over and intimidation of the Arab people struggling for true independence.

These bases were also crucial as a support for American troops and bases in Western Europe and for linking the American military alliance in South East Asia and the Middle East with NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

The sheer size of Wheelus base was a clear-cut indicator of its very importance. Stretching along the Mediterranean coast for a full 68 kilometres and comprising more than 600 military establishments or units manned by thousands of American military technicians and troops, Wheelus was the largest base outside American territory.

The Libyan Arab people were never unaware of the danger and the threat foreign military bases presented on their land. This awareness was deeply embedded not only in the Libyan Arab people but also in their Arab brothers and events were not long in proving this danger.

The nationalization of the Suez Canal by Egypt, was used as a pretext to strike a blow against the Arab revolution. With the collusion of the Zionists, already occupying Palestine, Britain and France attacked Egypt. Al Adem was used by British bombers in airborne attacks on Alexandria and other Egyptian cities.

In spite of the failure of this aggression against Egypt, the serious nature of the danger caused by this military presence became more evident. In order to further the American goal of complete domination of the region, American financial aid to the co-operative Libyan monarchy was increased and assistance was also distributed to other reactionary regimes. The falseness of Libya's independence under the monarchy can be gauged by a note from the memoirs of Kim Philby, who was head of the British Secret Service, and also a Soviet spy. Describing a subversive operation planned against Albania, Philby wrote that the British were to provide Malta as a forward base of operations and for the provision of the small boats required for the infiltration into Albania of sea-borne agents.

The Americans supplied most of the finance and logistical support together with the use of Wheelus base in Libya as a rear base and supply depot. The American grasp over Libya's regime was so strong that Philby also wrote that King Idris was not let into the secret. The foreign bases in Libya were to be used on several occasions by the United States against the Arab people. Full use was made of them in the invasion of Lebanon in support of the Phalangists against the progressive Islamic forces; during the Iraqi revolution, and to transport Belgian troops to the Congo to fight against the African revolutionary Patrice Lumumba.

The importance of Wheelus base continued to grow and its main function, apart from harboring the US Sixth Fleet and Air Force, was to protect the Zionists in their occupation of Palestine.

The Al Fateh Revolution in Libya, at the dawn of September 1, 1969, led by Mu'Ammar el Gaddafi was to change the whole situation. Barely a few months after the successful outcome of the Al Fateh Revolution Libya was to start experiencing the sweet taste of freedom, liberty, self-determination and self-expression. The closure of Wheelus base, and all other foreign bases in Libya together with the expulsion of the Fascist Italian community set the example for the Arab Nation to follow, and even to the whole world in general. The Libyan Arab Revolutionary Leader told the Libyan people:

"Revolution is the true expression of the people and the people demand evacuation. When we say this we do not confine ourselves to words only for we are prepared to liberate this land by any necessary means."

The British and Americans realized that Colonel Gaddafi's words were not an empty threat but a true revolu-

tionary warning. They soon received official notes demanding evacuation and they also soon realized that the revolutionary forces in Libya were prepared to fight to the death rather than leave parts of Libyan soil occupied by foreign troops.

The continuous bloody struggle of the Libyan Arab people from 1911 against the foreign aggressor and occupier added strength and power to the Revolutionary Leader's demand for evacuation. The exceptional degree of determination shown by the Libyan Arab people and the revolutionary leadership forced the Americans and British into submission. Thus was realized a dream of the Libyans a long awaited dream for living in true independence and freedom without any foreign military bases polluting their most dearest possession, their land.



TRIBUTE TO A FREEDOM-FIGHTER

Many were the great freedom fighters of Libya who sacrificed all they possessed to take up the armed struggle against the Fascist foreign occupation of their land.

The Libyan Arab Revolutionary Leader himself, Colonel Mu'Ammar el Gaddafi, bestowed due tribute to such freedom fighters. When Gaddafi spoke, he was expressing the feelings of his fellow Libyans in paying tribute to their forefathers who bore the brunt of Italian Fascism, one of the worst forms of imperialism which ever cursed this earth.

In the middle of September, 1981 Colonel Gaddafi delivered a long speech in Suluq, Libya, commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the death of Omar el Mukthar – a pioneer of the Libyan Arab man's ideals of freedom and justice.

This is why Colonel Gaddafi stated, ***"We stand here before the remains of one of these martyrs. In reality, this confirms our loyalty to the history of this nation"***.

Omar el Mukthar was not simply a Libyan martyr. He was more, much more. He was an Arab martyr. His anniversary is therefore remembered by the whole Arab progressive force and by the Arab masses.

Omar el Mukthar came from a small tribe in the Tobruk region and is buried in a modest grave. In Omar el Mukthar Gaddafi sees an expression of the spirit of sacrifice; of martyrdom for freedom.

Omar El Mukthar, the leader of Libya's freedom-fighters during the Fascist occupation, is today being regarded with esteem and prestige. The causes he gave his life for, have begun to be appreciated by a large homeland, the Arab Homeland, which is the fitting grave for Mukhtar.

Mukthar's struggle is symbolic for the Arab Nation's struggle being witnessed in the 1980's. The anniversary of his death is a symbolic funeral for the one and a half million martyrs who fell on the soil of Algeria for the Arab Nation's freedom. It is also symbolic for the martyrs of Palestine and Syria and all those of Yemen.

The tribute to Omar El Mukthar, as has often been expressed by Colonel Gaddafi, should be seen in the light of representing the appreciation and glorification of all the Arab martyrs. By the same token the Arab masses cannot forget the martyrs of 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973. Neither will the masses forget the martyrs of the July Revolution, and those

of Nabatiyah, Beirut, Aden and Algeria. By remembering the martyrdom of Omar el Mukthar, one is also remembering the martyrdom for freedom.

Omar El Mukthar's great principles were clearly shown when in 1922, the King of Italy, after issuing decree No. 2183, offered the salary of 1,000 Italian lire to him and a post. But Omar El Mukthar turned down these offers, even though he possessed no riches. He vowed but to struggle on against the foreign occupation of his country choosing martyrdom rather than subjugation.



1911 – A Libyan Jihad

CHRONOLOGY

- 1880 – Italy undertakes preparations for the invasion of Libya.
- 1881 – France invades Tunisia.
- 1882 – Britain invades Egypt.
- 1895 – An Italian defeat at the battle of Macalle.
- 1896 – Another Italian defeat at the battle of Adua.
- 1908 – A revolution by Turkey's youth.
- 1911 – **Italy invades Libya.**
- 1912 – Turkey signs the peace treaty of Ouchy.
- 1914 – The First World War.
- 1917 – The Balfour Declaration comes into effect creating the beginning of troubles and tensions to the Arabs and the Middle East.
- 1918 – Declaration of the Republic of Tripoli.
- 1922 – Mussolini becomes Italy's dictator.
- 1931 – **The death by hanging of the Libyan martyr Omar el Mukhtar.**
- 1939 – The Second World War.
- 1943 – Italy surrenders to the Allied Powers.
- 1945 – The Second World War comes to an end.
- 1947 – Italy renounces its colonies.
- 1948 – Palestine is handed to the Zionists thereby creating the so-called state of Israel.
- 1953 – Britain opens the military base at el-Aden on Libyan soil.
- 1954 – America opens military bases in Libya amongst them Wheelus base, the largest ever U.S. military base on foreign soil.
- 1956 – The Arab Revolutionary Leader, Egypt's President Gamal Abdul Nasser nationalises the Suez Canal.
- 1969 – Mu'Ammar el Gaddafi and a group of Libyan military officers carry out a bloodless revolution in Libya on the 1st of September.
- 1970 – The evacuation of British military bases in Libya.
- 1970 – The evacuation of American military bases in Libya.
- 1970 – The remainder of the Italian fascists in Libya are evacuated from Libyan soil.
- 1977 – Authority, wealth and arms in Libya is handed to the people thereby creating a new and unique system of governing whilst Libya is re-named "The Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamaheriya" (Jamaheriya meaning 'a state of the masses').

This book is dedicated to all freedom-loving peoples, to the people of the Mediterranean and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in particular, who, under the dark threatening shadows of American imperialism, are still striving to continue on the march for freedom and peaceful co-existence, thus contributing in no small way towards liberating this world from the evils of power-mongering politicians.

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Omar el Mukhtar, the leader of Libya's freedom-fighters during the Fascist occupation of Libya, is today being regarded with esteem and prestige. The causes he gave his life for, have begun to be appreciated by a large homeland, the Arab Homeland, which is the fitting grave for Mukhtar. His historically-recorded struggle is symbolic for the Arab Nation's struggle being witnessed in the 1980's.